Preston's John Sapazovski in action yesterday

Fans at the Preliminary Final show their colours

WPL Preliminary action between Box Hill Inter and Ashburton

FOXTEL CUP FINALS THE FINALE

Action from the WPL Preliminary Final between Ashburton and Box Hill Inter

Preston's Marinos Gasparis appeals that the ball has crossed the line as Knights keeper Adrian Cagalj tries to hold the defensive line

Melbourne Knights Anthony Pelikan sees red after getting his marching orders.

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INSIDE THIS WEEK...

Boo, Katsa & Tsigan

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GOAL! WEEKLY

Season 3: Issue 23 Monday 1st October 2007

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GRAND NIGHT OF GALA AWAITS

Season's awards to be presented at the Hyatt, tonight!

Ashburton's Amy Jackson

Preston Lion's Tony Sterjovski

Box Hill Inter's Georgia Koutrouvelis

Preston Lion's Pece Siveski

South Melbourne's Rama Tavsanciglou

Well, that time of year is back again. The time when a season of ups and downs comes to an end and everything culminates into a week of awards.

First, the Gold Medal for individual excellence takes place tonight, then the climax of 2007 culminates next weekend with the VPL Grand Final to determine the best team in Victorian soccer.

SBS commentator Simon Hill and comedian Dave Hughes will headline tonight's event which will crown the year's Best and Fairest players for the men and women.

After a year of surprises which saw the Preston Lions take out the minor premiership, Knights resurge through the ranks, Georgies get relegated and Springvale wonder what they were doing in the top flight, all have the chance to sit back and look back at the season that was.

The question is who will Altona's sash Becvinovski and Box Hill Inter's Anthea Vardakis will be giving up their medals to? Or will they good enough to pull off a double. The only people privy to that kind of information are the referees who give the players votes and the FFV.

Contenders for the 2007 Men's Gold Medal are James Holland, Marcus Stergiopoulos, Pece Siveski, Henry Fa'Arodo, Terry Antoniadis, Rama Tavsanciglou, Tony Sterjovski, Levent Osman and Graham Hockless.

And for the Women's medal, the following names will most certainly be up there: Sarah Groenwald, Georgia Koutrouvelis, Anthea Vardakas, Maika Ruyter Hooley, Belinda Pannella, Seyma Erenli, Amy Jackson, Ashlee Good and Katia Tavolaro.

Whether you are lucky enough to witness the crowning in person at the luxurious Grand Hyatt or you wait for the news the following day make sure you read all the gritty details in next week's issue of Goal! Weekly.

Previous Winners
2006 Sash Becvinovski Altoma Magic 27 votes
2005 Anthony Magnacca Preston Lions 35
2004 Doug Mladenovic & Ricky Diaco Magic & Pines 15
2003 Chris Emsovski Preston Lions 33
2002 Jim Kourtis Bentleigh Greens 17
2001 Chris Emsovski & Zoran Todorovski Lions & Magic 21
2000 Damian Vojtek St Albans Saints 21

Heidelberg United's Sarah Groenewald

Heidelberg United's Belinda Pannella

Oakleigh Cannon's Marcus Stergiopoulos

Box Hill Inter's Anthea Vardakas

James Holland of the AIS

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SYDNEY FC 1 - 0 NEWCASTLE JETS

By Mike Salter in Sydney

SLICK SYDNEY SHOWS ITS CLASS

Juninho and Brosque architect impressive win

Sydney FC's second win of the season was achieved in far more impressive style than their first.

It was Alex Brosque's superbly-taken goal which eventually won the day, but Sydney might well have added to their score in the second half.

Branko Culina made only one change to the side that had ground out a win at Suncorp Stadium; Juninho, his shoulder now sufficiently recovered, returned to the starting eleven at the expense of Ufuk Talay.

Gary van Egmond faced a number of selection problems, not least the late withdrawal of Joel Griffiths, who was declared unfit during the pre-game warm-up. Tarek Elrich took his place, while Paul Kohler replaced the suspended Stuart Musialik in the midfield anchor role. There were three other changes; Mario Jardel received his first A-League start, replacing his compatriot Denni, while Steve Laybutt returned to Australian football in central defence, with Andrew Durante unavailable. Jobe Wheelhouse was preferred to Troy Hearfield in midfield.

Brosque and Steve Corica both had half-chances in the first ten minutes, while referee Craig Zetter flashed some early yellow cards at certain over-exuberant Newcastle players.

With Newcastle far too static in attack and Sydney FC not playing with sufficient width, the first half was fairly sterile. Twice Matt Thompson got forward to good effect on the Newcastle left, but on both occasions his cross was disappointing. Mario Jardel did pitifully little at the point of the attack, managing just the one off-target snapshot on 34 minutes.

A couple of minutes later, Sydney FC scored the only goal of the game, from a fine move. With a number of Newcastle players committed upfield, the ball broke to Juninho in the middle; the Brazilian slid a superb pass through to coincide with Brosque's diagonal run. Outpacing a ponderous Laybutt and turning Jade North nicely, Brosque curled the ball past the advancing Ante Covic.

Troy Hearfield replaced the ineffective Jardel at the break, and Newcastle briefly rallied; Adam Griffiths headed a free kick from Adam D'Apuzzo over the bar on 53 minutes, and Hearfield began to make some purposeful excursions on the right.

On the hour mark, however, Sydney began to take control of the game, and for the next 15 minutes they produced some of the best football seen in the competition this year.

The passing was crisp and inventive, the movement off the ball was intelligent, and the chances came thick and fast. Brendan Santalab headed over from a Brosque cross; Juninho shot just wide after Newcastle had given the ball away in their own area, and then Mark Rudan and Santalab both had their shots at goal blocked following a corner.

Although Sydney FC began to lose their rhythm somewhat in the final fifteen minutes, the win rarely looked in doubt. Ufuk Talay replaced a tiring Corica on 74 minutes, and soon afterwards Denni made his expected appearance, replacing Wheelhouse.

It was the young Brazilian who would have Newcastle's best chance; another free kick from D'Apuzzo reached Denni in the box on 88 minutes, but his gentle flick was held easily by Clint Bolton, who will have had few quieter nights than this.

Sydney FC: Bolton; Casey, Rudan, Milligan, Fyfe; Zadkovich, McFlynn; Santalab, Juninho (Patrick), Corica (Talay); Brosque.

Newcastle United Jets: Covic; D'Apuzzo, North, Laybutt, Thompson; Kohler; Wheelhouse (Denni), A.Griffiths; Elrich (Hoffman), Jardel (Hearfield), Bridge.

Sydney FC Player Ratings:

Bolton: 7/10. Had virtually nothing to do.
Casey: 7/10. Not always sound in his positioning, but he seems to be settling into the right-back role well.
Rudan: 7/10. Dominated Mario Jardel, and made one or two useful excursions upfield.
Milligan: 6/10. Not as creative as he can be, but solid enough in defence.
Fyfe: 6/10. Out of position at left-back again, but managed well enough on this occasion.
Zadkovich: 7/10. Has looked much more lively since returning to central midfield.
McFlynn: 7/10. An effective evening from the Ulsterman, who cleaned up well in front of the back four and distributed efficiently.
Santalab: 6/10. Not often sighted in the first half, but made some telling contributions to the attack in the second.
Juninho: 7/10. Intermittently influential. His pass through to Brosque for the goal was sublime.
Corica: 6/10. Not one of his best nights, although he did come to life during Sydney's period of dominance in the second half. Combined well with Juninho at times.
Brosque: 9/10. Outstanding at the apex of the attack. He is a player transformed this season.

Substitutes:
Talay: 6/10. Largely anonymous.
Patrick: 7/10. Looked lively in his very brief appearance.

A-LEAGUE STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1 Central Coast Mariners	**6**	**4**	**1**	**1**	**7**	**2**	**5**	**13**
2 Newcastle Jets	6	2	3	1	5	4	1	9
3 Melbourne Victory	**6**	**1**	**5**	**0**	**7**	**5**	**2**	**8**
4 Wellington Phoenix	6	2	2	2	10	10	0	8
5 Sydney FC	**6**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**5**	**5**	**0**	**8**
6 Adelaide United	6	1	4	1	9	9	0	7
7 Queensland Roar	**6**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**8**	**-3**	**5**
8 Perth Glory	6	0	3	3	2	7	-5	3

NEXT ROUND

Roar v Phoenix
Friday 5th Oct KO 8pm

Mariners v Jets
Sunday 7th Sept KO 5pm

Sydney v Victory
Saturday 6th Sept KO 7pm

Glory v Adelaide
Sunday 7th Sept KO 5pm

TOP SCORERS

4- Bruce Djite (AU).
3- Sasho Petrovski (CCM), Shane Smeltz (WP).
2- Alex Brosque (SFC), Nathan Burns (AU), Daniel (WP), Felipe (WP), Adam Kwasnik (CCM), Matt McKay (QR), Nik Mrdja (CCM), Kevin Muscat (MV), Archie Thompson (MV).
1- Richie Alagich (AU), Daniel Allsopp (MV),Ross Aloisi (WP), Mark Bridge (NJ), Adam Casey (SFC), Adrian Caceres (MV), Billy Celeski (PG), Vaughan Coveny (WP), Diego (AU), Travis Dodd (AU), Adam Griffiths (NJ), Joel Griffiths (NJ), Jamie Harnwell (PG), Josh McLoughan (QR), Stuart Musialik (NJ), Sasa Ognenovski (QR), Patrick (SFC), Reinlaldo (QR), Ufuk Talay (SFC), Matt Thompson (NJ), Rodrigo Vargas (MV).

ROUND 6 DETAILS

Melbourne Victory 2
(Kevin Muscat 68' (penalty), Archie Thompson 85')
Queensland Roar 0
Friday, 28 September 2007
Telstra Dome, Melbourne
Referee: Ben Williams
Assistant Referees: Jim Oularis & Luke Brennan
Fourth Official: Kevin Docherty
Crowd: 25,622

Sydney FC 1
(Alex Brosque 36')
Newcastle Jets 0
Saturday, 29 September 2007
Sydney Football Stadium
Referee: Craig Zetter
Assistant Referees: Murray Wilson & Gavin Martin
Fourth Official: Strebre Delovski
Crowd: 13,755

Wellington Phoenix 4
(Ross Aloisi 13', Shane Smeltz 42', Vaughan Coveny 56', Tony Lochhead 83')
Perth Glory 1
(Billy Celeski 10')
Sunday, 30 September 2007
Westpac Stadium, Wellington, New Zealand
Referee: Peter Green
Assistant Referees: Brent Best & Nick Waldron
Fourth Official: Peter O'Leary
Crowd: 10,127

Adelaide United 2
(Bruce Djite 19'/88')
Central Coast Mariners 1
(Sasho Petrovski 37')
Sunday, 30 September 2007
Hindmarsh Stadium, Adelaide
Referee: Matthew Breeze
Assistant Referees: Paul Cetrangolo & Peter Chapman
Fourth Official: Craig Zetter
Crowd: 11,019

Hyundai A-League 2007/08 – Crowd Figures

Club	Home Games	Ave.	Low	High	Total
Adelaide United	**2**	**11,625**	**11,019**	**12,231**	**23,250**
CC Mariners	**2**	**9,163**	**9,052**	**9,274**	**18,326**
Melbourne Victory	**3**	**28,173**	**25,622**	**31,545**	**84,518**
Newcastle Jets	**3**	**12,650**	**11,179**	**13,627**	**37,950**
Perth Glory	**3**	**7,908**	**7,203**	**8,508**	**23,725**
Queensland Roar	**3**	**14,075**	**8,815**	**16,828**	**42,225**
Sydney FC	**4**	**14,484**	**11,491**	**18,457**	**57,936**
Phoenix	**4**	**12,038**	**10,127**	**14,421**	**48,153**
Total	**24**	**14,003**	**7,203**	**31,545**	**336,083**

Round 6

VICTORY AT LONG LAST!

Melbourne records first win for 2007/08

MELBOURNE VICTORY 2 - 0 QUEENSLAND ROAR

By simon Chiarelli
Photos by Theres Duffy

Melbourne Victory recorded its first A-League triumph since the Grand Final demolition of Adelaide United and consolidated its place in the top four after a 2-0 win over the luckless Queensland Roar at Telstra Dome.

After weathering an hour long barrage from the Roar, the Victory broke though for its first goal on home soil thanks to a Kevin Muscat penalty before Archie Thompson sealed the result late with his second goal of the season.

The Roar though were desperately unlucky to leave empty handed after dominating possession for a majority of the contest, squandering a number of chances in typical fashion as they left dumbfounded as to how they let a result escape their grasp.

Captain Craig Moore had a shot cleared off the goal line in the second stanza before youngster Michael Zullo scorned a stunning double chance after heading against the woodwork and directing the rebound wide.

And to add further to their woe, Reinaldo was denied an almost certain penalty after being wrestled to the ground in brutal style with the game still in the balance.

It was one of only a few fouls not sited by referee Ben Williams, who awarded seven cautions throughout the contest, leading Roar coach Frank Farina to slam another suspect officiating performance.

"Straight after their penalty, Reinaldo was rugby tackled in the box and the referee was ten yards away," he said.

"I think some of the cards out there were soft, and when he should have given cards, he didn't. There was no rough stuff in it, and how many cards do we have? Seven cards, it was ridiculous.

"Some of the stuff that's going on is just garbage. Tonight wasn't physical and he gave seven cards."

The Roar made a flying start with Marcinho prominent early, firing just high of goal after only three minutes.

And the siege only continued as the half progressed with fellow Brazilian, Reinaldo, using his physical strength to great effect.

Queensland stifled the Victory midfield of space to enact its swift passing game as Muscat struggled to find his range, sending a number of passes astray.

But Melbourne almost capitalised on a piece of poor defending in the 29th minute when Leandro found space on the right flank.

The Brazilian proceeded to cut inside before playing a low ball which found Danny Allsopp, who directed his strike wide.

15 minutes later, Victory again almost took a scarcely deserved lead when Thompson orchestrated a counter attack, bursting into the attacking half before playing an incisive ball into the path of Leandro, who took a touch before directing his attempt just wide of goal.

These moments though were only fleeting for the home side, who were unable to apply sustained pressure or maintain possession for the entirety of the first hour.

Despite playing an attractive, free-flowing style of football, the Roar were unable to take advantage of the plethora of opportunities which fell their way, and in the 66th minute they were punished when Leandro was brought down in the area.

Muscat converted the penalty to complete a sterling display from the club captain, who defied a knee injury and broken arm to take his place in the team's starting line-up.

Melbourne's win was capped off in style by Thompson in the final five minutes when the attacker pounced on a looping pass from Leandro before smashing a first time shot underneath Roar custodian Liam Reddy.

Melbourne Victory: 1.Michael THEOKLITOS (gk), 2.Kevin MUSCAT (Captain), 3.Daniel PIORKOWSKI, 6.Steve PANTELIDIS, 8.Grant BREBNER, 9.Danny ALLSOPP (14. Adrian CACERES 62'), 10.Archie THOMPSON (16.Carlos HERNANDEZ 90 + 1'), 11.Joseph KEENAN (21.Sebastian RYALL 79'), 12.Rodrigo VARGAS, 15.Leandro LOVE, 18.Leigh BROXHAM.

Yellow Cards: Grant Brebner 50', Daniel Piorkowski 58', Joseph Keenan 74'.

Red Cards: Nil

Queensland Roar FC: 1.Liam REDDY (gk), 4.Craig MOORE (Captain), 5.Josh McCLOUGHAN, 8.Massimo MURDOCCA, 9.Simon LYNCH (7.Michael ZULLO 71'), 11.REINALDO, 15.Matt McKAY, 16.Hyuk-Su SEO (14.Ben GRIFFIN 85'), 18.Danny TIATTO,19.Sasa Ognenovski, 23.MARCINHO (10. Ante MILICIC 71').

Substitutes Not Used: 30.Griffin McMASTER (gk).

Yellow Cards: Danny Tiatto 45', Sasa Ognenovski 67', Massimo Murdocca 81', Reinaldo 88'.

Red Cards: Nil

Victory Player Ratings

Michael Theoklitos - 8 – Brilliant display from ever reliable custodian

Kevin Muscat - 8 – Struggled early, but was influential throughout the second

Daniel Piorkowski - 7 – Solid performance from ever consistent defender

Steve Pantelidis - 6 – Tried tirelessly all night

Grant Brebner - 5 – Again ineffective as he tries to arrest a form slump

Danny Allsopp - 5 - Played in obvious discomfort, and his performance reflected that

Archie Thompson - 8 – Another stellar display from the marquee star

Joseph Keenan - 7 – Damaging when pushing forward on the left

Rodrigo Vargas - 7 – Made last-ditch goal line save

Leandro Love - 8 – Continues to build his reputation and popularity among fans

Leigh Broxham - 6 – Midfield dynamo drifted in and out of the contest

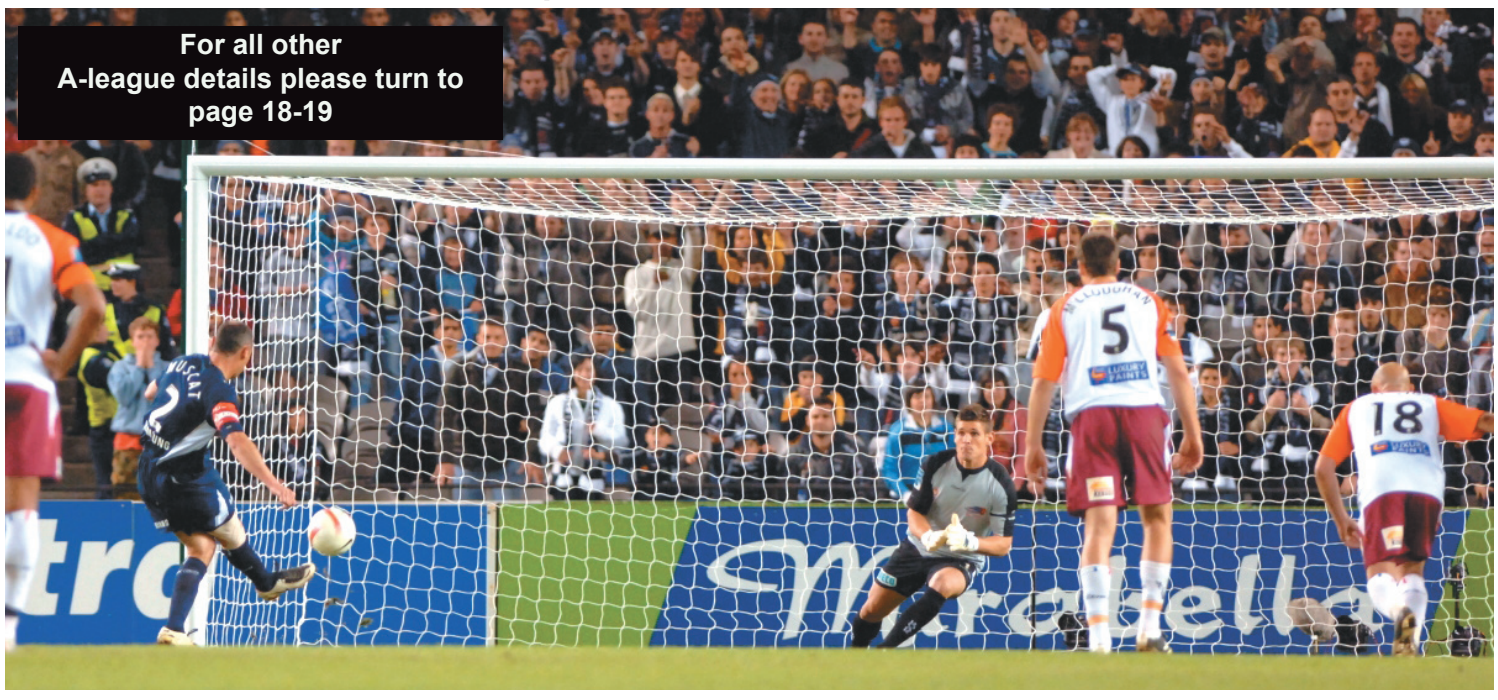
Substitutes

Adrian Caceres – 6 – Made an impact off the bench

Carlos Hernandez – N/R – Only came on in injury time

Sebastian Ryall - 5 – Unable to exert influence in limited game time

For all other A-league details please turn to page 18-19



Captain Kevin Muscat converts the spot-kick to put Victory on their way to its first win for the season.

This week's line-up

Gold Medal Preview	2
Victory v Roar	3
Mike Chatzitrifonas	5
Tsigan's Tsigar	6
Boo & Katsa	7
Foxtel Cup Details	8
Lions v Knights	9
Grand Final Preview	10-11
Ashy v Inter	12
Overseas	15
Tartan Talk	16
Succeroo	17
A-League	18-19

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MOORE CRITICIZES A-LEAGUE

Queensland captain and Socceroo great Craig Moore has questioned the quality of football on display in the A-League, claiming the playing standard needs to improve dramatically.

While the league is among the most physical in Asia, Moore believes the speed and tempo of the Australian game is lagging behind some of the more established leagues in the world and that it needs to be rectified.

"Was it (the game fast paced)? I don't know. Maybe people can run fast and those sorts of things, but I still think the thought processes are far too slow," he said following Queensland's 2-0 loss to Melbourne.

"It's one of those things where players get the ball and then think what they are doing with it rather than knowing what they are going to do before they get the ball. I think this is the thing that needs to improve in Australian football."

The former Rangers captain praised good friend, and opposition captain, Kevin Muscat as the perfect example of a player who displays composure when in possession of the ball, a compliment and description which contrasts starkly with Muscat's early reputation as a brutal full-back.

"A good player, doesn't matter how fast the game is always seems to have time on the ball, and those players stand out head and shoulders above everybody else," he said.

"Kevin Muscat for Melbourne, you can see he has that extra bit of experience where as we were very naive."

However, Moore, who signed for the Roar following a two-year stint with Newcastle United in the English Premier League, conceded the standard of play has improved considerably since the establishment of the league in late 2005.

"I think it has improved from the beginning of the A-League to where we are at just now, but that's the part that needs to improve for us to talk about where we are in comparison to the rest of the world," he said.

Moore's comments follow cries from a number of media outlets that the current season has been the most boring since the competition's inception with few goals, many draws and teams being ravaged by international call-ups.

Moore in happier times...

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By James Taylor

CHATZITRIFONAS FLOCKS TO EAGLE'S NEST

Mike Chatzitrifonas is the new man in charge at Richmond Eagles, following the departure of Doug Hodgson. The appointed was made official during the week after Chatzitrifonas was head-hunted by the ambitious Kevin Bartlett Reserve outfit. Chatzitrifonas had worked a minor miracle at a cash-strapped Western Suburbs this season, staving off an ongoing relegation fight to hoist the club to a respectable mid-table position in its first tilt at Victoria's big time league, the Foxtel Cup.

Speaking exclusively to Goal! Weekly, Chatzitrifonas said, "I want to make it perfectly clear from the outset, that my decision to cross over to Richmond should not be seen as a reflection on Western Suburbs as a club. I enjoyed two wonderful years at Ralph Reserve and met some great people. My relationship with the president and the committee members was very personal and encouraging. My final decision was not taken lightly.

Having said that, in the two years at Suburbs we managed to achieve our objectives – initially it was to get promoted to the Premier League and then to remain and consolidate our status in the league. After our targets were met I just felt that the time was right to possibly look around at other options. When Richmond came calling I was very impressed with their optimism for short term and long term success.

I was very surprised that they decided to part company with Doug Hodgson, and I was actually in Queensland on holiday when I got the phone call. On my return to Melbourne I met up with Eagles officials and I was impressed with what they had to say. I also spoke to Helmut Kalitzki by phone, and I felt it would be a good move for me.

Asked what type of deal had been struck, Chatzitrifonas replied, "I've agreed to coach the club for the coming season and once Helmut returns from overseas we'll talk about the finer details. I just felt as a coach it was a good career move for me. I hopefully will give me more scope to hopefully make the finals, so I'm very excited about the outlook.

In regards to money available for transfer activity, Chatzitrifonas said, "My initial discussions with the club regarding budgets have been extremely helpful in understanding the club's current position and the current squad. I obviously want to make a mark on the side and bring in players that I feel will bolster the squad's chances to make the finals. I'm not prepared to mention any names, but I certainly believe that we'll have a far stronger squad that will hopefully make a real tilt at making finals. But certainly, the current squad as it stands is a strong squad, but once again, we have to wait until Helmut returns from overseas before we can confirm anything.It's all pretty exciting really."

Asked when he thinks he'll be able to begin preparation for next season Chatzitrifonas replied, "It's all up in the air at the moment. Once the FFV announces when the league will commence for 2008, then we can sit down and workout a plan for pre-season and beyond. Certainly, the task of speaking to a few new recruits has already begun and we've arranged to meet with the current players next Thursday to inform them of the changes, and I look forward to meeting them then. I intend to speak to all the players individually and taking things from there."

Western Suburbs will be sorry to see the back of Mike Chatzitrifonas.

According to Chatzitrifonas, quite a number of players on the Eagles list have contracts that are up for renewel, but he insisted that all players that are registered at Kevin Bartlett Reserve will be required and in due time will be reviewed.

Asked what he thinks he can bring to the table for Richmond after the experience of coaching a side with limited resources at Suburbs, Chatzitrifonas added, "I had a squad of players at Suburbs who were committed to proving people wrong. The fact we went unbeaten for the last eight games and we experienced a sensational second half of the season was indicative of the team's performance, effort and desire to beat the drop. One invaluable lesson I've learnt with Suburbs, is that there's no substitute for hard work. The players really played for the jumper, and that's a philosophy I really hope to replicate some of those values at Richmond. It was very rewarding and pleasing for me to see that their efforts were rewarded and justified. Hopefully a similar combination will help Richmond experience finals football for next season."

Suburbs president, John Hatzimouralis, was philosophical to the fact of losing an astute coach with proven survival instincts by saying, "I say to him, good luck. We would like to wish him well in his new career with the Richmond Eagles. We're sad to lose him as I would have liked Michael to take Suburbs through for another year of Premier League, just to prove that it wasn't a fluke, but obviously the offer was too good to refuse."

The club has yet to make an official appointment and hasn't formally interviewed anyone, but hope to conduct a selection process fairly soon in order to give the successful candidate ample opportunity to coordinate a pre-season program and implement any changes to the current player roster.

STRATEGIC ZONE MEETINGS ARE ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

FFV President Tony Dunkerely addresses the meetingFootball Federation Victoria has recently completed a series of Zone Strategic Meetings across Victoria for the Central, Northern, North West, Western, Gippsland, North East and East zones.

The meetings have been met with a waive of interest and goodwill resulting in strong positive feedback from stakeholders that will assist FFV with the strategic planning for the future of the sport in Victoria.

Views and opinions have been sort from clubs and other stakeholders and relayed to FFV staff and the Board of Directors right across the state.

FFV has been pleased with the open exchange of dialogue that will inevitably lead to greater pathways of communication between the state body and all of its stakeholders across the breadth of Victoria.

"I have been very impressed with the quality of the ideas and concepts coming from the clubs," says Federation President Mr. Tony Dunkerely.

"The enthusiastic response from both Metro and Country clubs gives us great confidence moving forward and is critical in establishing a long tern strategic plan for Football Federation Victoria," explains Mr. Dunkerley.

FFV will be visiting the remainder of the zones in the next two weeks and is looking forward to further positive discussions.

The Federation's Strategic Plan is scheduled to be finalised by December 1st.

2007 FFA NATIONAL YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR BOYS

Under 14's

South Australia 2 (M.Perrone 14min; N.Mileusnic 51min) **def Northern NSW 1** (K.Davidson 23min)

Capital Football 1 (J.Geira 27min) **def Queensland Metro 0**

Football West 3 (B.Nguyen 21min; S.Michael 23min, 35min) **def Victoria Country 0**

Queensland country 3 (J.Brillante 7 min, 35min; H.Noble 23min) **def Northern Territory 1** (A.O'Regan 53min)

NSW Metro 4 (Y.Kusdian 21min; R.Caria 37min; C.Gamerio 47min) **def VIC Metro 3** (J.Maclaren 1min, 14min; M.Schroen 41min; C.Good *OWN GOAL* 52min)

NSW Country 1 (M.Mills 50min) def **Tasmania 0**

Under 15's

Victoria Country 2 (M.Anderson 42min, 45min) **– NSW Country 2** (B.Hall 52min, 68min)

Queensland Country 12 (R.Mottin 30min,33min,58min; L.Waugh 1min; B.Hay 22min,34min, 48min,54min,65min; J.McMullen 42min; H.Duffie 53min; B.Holt 69min) def **Northern Territory 1** (A.Maniju 33min)

Victoria Metro 4 (D.Lokvanic 14min, 30min; K.Ibrahim 47min, 65min) **def Northern NSW 0**

Football West 1 (E.Babalj 9min) – **Capital Football** (D.Gapare 51min)

Queensland Metro 4 (K.Satake 4min; P.Lamin 6min; J.Mason 7min; J.Macintyre 45min) **def Tasmania 0**

NSW Metro 3 (D.Petratos 4min; J.Lum 33min; N.Stanojevic 38min) **def South Australia 1** (S.Maio 60min)

Western Australia 2 (S.Kerr 8', R.Davies 19') **Queensland 1** (B.Whitfield 4')

NSW 3 (S.Kingsley 33', L.Mahoney 36'/53') **South Australia 0**

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TSIGAN'S TSIGAR

CAMELS VS PARROTS

Who wouldn't want to watch with awe, as these two gargantuans of the Sporting Code go head to head, toe to toe, hump to beak in a do or die clash to bring home the bacon?
The supporter base of Afghani's and Incas will be wondering whether or not they can deal with this amount of harrumph in the bars afterwards.

Sequins
Tassels
Frocks
Pink tops and tights.
Teal an optional extra.

Why do "blokes" want to dress up in drag in front of people and give Priscilla a rogering at every end of season shindig? There is enough arse patting and tongue in ear hoopla during the season, that we as the ogling football public Getafix on Asterix's Obelix. I am more than thankful that at the Brownlow and other various medal counting nights, we are only subjected to numbers, and sheila's wearing tops low enough to see their respective cracks and cleavage, designer tags and silicone rolls.

So why a "Gay World Cup"?
Do we need the endorsement of rich Hollywood executives and Yellow Brick Road lickers, to prove that football is "universal"?
Our universe has a hundred billion galaxies, each approximately 77 billion miles across.
Each galaxy is made up a billion, gazillion stars, and every one of those stars has a further billion planets, and out of all those planets, only we could hold a Gay World Cup.

Argentinean Los Dogos defeated England's Stonewall 1-0 in Buenos Aires, in a spiteful encounter which produced 6 pink cards, 3 yellows and 5 crème de la guache.
The Argentine coach, Nestor Gammella, praised the efforts of his chargers, saying they "…didn't give the opposition any womb to move, and manned up tighter than a Beef Taquitos at the Cantina."

The chants from the respective happy chappies were mainly rip-offs from West Side Story and I Dream of Jeanie. Who would've envisioned frills and spills, chills and pills as these two teams ran around checking their nails, and holding their "pecs" instead of their nuts during free kicks? Japan, Turkey and Germany whipped out their heavy artillery but never penetrated the front or rear of the Allied Resistance. Teams came and went, but thankfully there was enough protection and safety from rubber bullets fired from their fully loaded guns. The change room celebrations are best left to the imagination of Culture Club fans and Queen worshippers.

Some mothers do 'av 'em as Versace rocks Jocks at the Gay World Cup

For all those out there who are politically incorrect and its subsidiaries, here is the address to register your complaint.

The Royal Frog Trampling Institute
13/8 La Rue Francois
Covent Garden
London
W.C FIELDS

And so without further a due, here's a wee bitter dictation on the current situation, with something to send shivers up your spine; and send some creepy crawlies down your larder and limes.

The October Omen has come to fruition, and those of us here in the nerve centre of Melbopolis have plucked out the tea leaves and turned the saucer cups upside down. The Ministry of Prognostication received a fafillion dollar bonus, and the kesh will be well spent next weekend at the annual Scratch n Sniff conference, held at the Red Eye Backpackers Vunder Bar. Hot tips and bets for the Iron Cross, places Smooch at 6/4, Boo at 8-1, Katsa a great value at 10, and Tsigan the dark horse running at 35's milking it for what its worth.

MORE SOLID GOLD

VPL Gold Medal night will hopefully see a few of the youngin's getting ejected before the votes are even read, and a few chickie wa-wa's pulling their hair out in a plastic pool full of KY Aeroplane Jelly. One can only ask that the FFV hierarchy will get blotto with the players, and possibly sing Khe San at the halfway point, leaving the best till last. Tony Pignata jumping out of a 6foot blancmange wearing nothing but some lovely jubblies. The after party invites all vagabonds back to Mark Rendell's for Sexy Scrabble, Pin the Tail on the President and Bellisimo Bondage.

Players who have played 250 Premier League games or more, and have purposefully prodded referees for extra votes will be situated in the "A" section, right next to the WPL faithful, so they can compare notes on kicking and screaming, bitching and twitching. Frank Arok is the MC, and with a plethora of SBS subtitle conformists at his desposal, the festivities will be nothing short of tragically facetious. The last time Frank did the honors, it was because Andy Paschalidis forgot to wax his body, and the crowd lost control of their bodily functions upon sight of his impersonation of George "The Animal" Steele. Wizz Fizz was to blame.

Coaches and wives have been asked to refrain from canoodling after the 2nd bottle of wine, and players who subscribe to EMO shall be forcibly cattle prodded at 240 volts. Hitherto, all subsequent touching and tonsil fondling will be captured on Ross Alatsas' Greatest Hits, and posted on YouTube before the end of the night. Anyone found parking in a Handicapped Zone without being keeled over the wheel with a bottle of Absynthe in one hand, will be handed a complimentary FFV position in 2008.

Let this be a lesson to the rest of you nuts.
Don't believe you can get up to shenanigans without the express permission of FIFA, ASF, FFA, FFV and RACV. If you do, you will end up coaching at National Level in Turkmenistan, being paid in cheese and the local farmer's 55 year old virgin daughter hanging off your arm screaming, "Why can't you sire me a child?"

Thank you for your retrospection.

Yours in Jiggery-Pokery;
Tsigan Forever

5am VPL Gold Medal action

BOO'S WORLD

A satirical look at the World of Football according to Mark Boric

It wasn't pretty, but Melbourne Victory ended their run of draws with a 2-0 win over Queensland Roar on Friday. So my line about drawing as much as much as a teenage graffiti "artist" has been put on hold.

Had a look at the FFV Conditions of Entry for the Finals 2007. Now I'm not going to get into the debate of what slogans and images on banners are acceptable and what size that can be. It just think is good to see they have catered for the referee's requirements (item g. prohibiting "Dogs or other animals except for guide dogs and hearing animals"). Inflatable devices are also banned, so those picking up a date from an Adult Store will have to change their plans.

Rumours that Oakleigh Cannons may be curbing their big spending ways have been greeted with disappointment by Jose Mourinho, who is looking for a job and had the Foxtel Cup big spenders in mind as a possible employer.

Rumours of a "B League" including a few former NSL clubs are picking up. A League, B League, V League. Brought to you by Sesame Street.

Reading between the lines in last week's Katsa's Korner I got the idea that Katsa had been asked by those high up at the FFV what his problem with them is. Which is an unfair question, given the man only gets half a page a week in which to cram in his answer.

To start at the top, there is the Premier League. Or the Foxtel Cup as it became about a week before the season kicked off after a late sponsorship deal. Clubs were distributed Foxtel logos to be put on shirts about three weeks after the season began, a level of professionalism which perhaps explains why it took so long to sign up a sponsor.

As per usual the logos were distributed with the standard FFV letter explaining how you would be fined if the logos were not on the shirts in time for the next game. Did you know the favourite 1116SEN radio host of those that work at the FFV is Mark Fine? They just love fines at that place.

Now last season the Premier League expanded to 16 teams through no other reason than the FFV, through it's ill-managed disciplinary system and resulting legal challenges, not being able to determine who out of Essendon Royals and Sunshine Georgies should be relegated. It was a cop-out decision which only served to weaken the public's confidence in the FFV as a serious organisation.

Water restrictions saw the start of the season put back. That, or the fixtures program on the FFV computers accidentally being lost when someone tried wiping their porn trail clean. That would explain the fixtures being later than a Danny Tiatto tackle. When the program was finally put into use, it was too late for every team in the Foxtel Cup to play each other twice, apparently, so an un-even draw was introduced. This unfair (from dictionary.com: 1.not fair; not conforming to approved standards, as of justice, honesty, or ethics 2.disproportionate; undue; beyond what is proper or fitting) draw meant that finals and relegation places could hinge on how many times you got to play Springvale White Eagles.

The water restrictions issue will be around next season as well, I hope the FFV have made some contingencies. Hopefully if they schedule any games at their own, artificially turfed facilities at Darebin International Sports Centre, they can make sure referees turn up so we don't have a repeat of what ocurred at the recent catch-up game between Plenty Valley Lions and Lalor.

To be continued.

Mourinho's CV could possibly read as follows...Porto, Chelsea and Oakleigh Cannons

Youth Tour Germany 2008
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Many countries competing (including European & Asian teams)
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kris.kalifatidis@iag.com.au
Ph: 0401 711 938

Katsa's Korner With George Katsamboukas

8-26 Declared

Katsa's Scoreboard Sponsored by W N Field & J Walker

Tassie Devils

For those with a fetish for the rough and tumble, and above the waist tackles…..

Look no further than the Tasmanian Premier League.

I stumbled across the Final of the Tasmanian Premier League last week, on the Foxtel Soccer Show, it made very interesting viewing indeed.

Over the Ball tackles a-plenty, complemented by a zero skill level.

I'm tempted to pop the boots back on and catch the Spirit of Tasmania down to the Apple Isle, even with one knee, the other being held together with a Steve Austin Six Million Dollar Man bionic plate, I'm sure that I could leave my "mark" down there.

As for the commentator, perhaps a career in commentating Chess Matches may be more his calling, he was about as exciting as watching Ernie's Victory Boys recent first half performances.

Doh!

Apologies go out to the good folks at Foxtel, and the FFV, (G'day Mark), for my repeated use of the name Vodafone Cup this season.

Vodafone and the FFV parted company some time ago, the top notch league is now called the Foxtel Cup.

Rent a crowd was out in force last week, at the Oakleigh Canons Vs Melbourne Knights match at Bob Jane Stadium.

The regular punters showed little interest in this match, thankfully, the FFV once again showed its Marketing Prowess and managed to entice a few more people there, by using some pretty nifty Marketing Strategies.

It went something like this…

The Victorian Junior Teams were invited along to collect their Uniforms and be presented to the crowd at half time.

Naturally, these juniors do not drive, so Mum and Dad needed to take them.

Well they couldn't hang around the Car park, could they?

So in they popped to see the presentation which took place at Half Time, "so why not Jane, we may as well watch the game"

Match Day Action

The Oakleigh Canons were once gain knocked out early in the finals Series, losing 1-0, compliments of an Anthony Pelikan goal, the irony being, that Pelikan left the Cannons for the Knights during the season.

Another good performer was ex Oakleigh Keeper, Adrian Cagalj, who pulled off some very impressive saves.

Nothing haunts a team more than when ex-players excel against them, it's like dumping your Mrs on a Friday night, and on the next night, she pulls First Division in Tatslotto!

The turning point of this match though came at the 74th minute. I was sitting behind the Knights bench, and was doing it quite tough, after a losing Battle with J Walker the night before.

Chris Taylor summoned a substitute to come on, up pops, Mate Dugandzic, what this player lacks in body weight, he certainly makes up for it in skill, at 17, he has the skill and confidence of a 15 year seasoned campaigner, and caused the experienced Cannons defence no end of problems.

I asked around about Dugandzic after the match, seems that from what I found out, he has never represented Victoria or made the VIS. If this is correct, perhaps the talent scouts are also losing their battles with J Walker!

Thankfully, Mark has set up the V Elite Program who will actually identify and develop young talented players such as Dugandzic.

Hot property: Knight Mate Dugandzic

As for the Cannons…

Back to the Drawing Board, as they once again, failed to impress in the Finals Series.

Unfortunately, results during the Home and Away season count for zero once it is over, as once the Finals begin; it's like a new Season.

The Whittlesea Stallions are a good example of this, as they hardly set the world on fire during the first half of the Season, and were prime candidates to visit the Westgate at Season's end, however, they have come home with a wet sail, and won both their Finals matches, one more win, and they will be crowned Champions.

Word Association of the Week

Pop Star – Soccer Player who drives an imported vehicle, talks himself up at negotiation time, usually has Gel in his hair, wears an earring, has a tattoo, and has had more Clubs, than I've had J Walkers.

PS He does not come cheap either!

PPS He is also very, very over rated.

This is Katsa – Just as you've known him.
90 Minutes
90 Scotches

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FOXTEL CUP FINAL STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS
Preston Lions	26	14	9	3	44	26	48
Melbourne Knights	26	14	5	7	38	21	47
Whittlesea Zebras	26	14	5	7	35	28	47
Altona Magic	26	13	7	6	34	24	46
Oakleigh Cannons	26	13	5	8	47	33	44
Green Gully Cavaliers	26	11	7	8	37	28	40
South Melbourne	26	10	7	9	39	33	37
Heidelberg Utd	26	10	7	9	32	37	37
Western Suburbs	26	8	11	7	27	25	35
Richmond	26	10	4	12	44	32	34
Fawkner Blues	26	9	6	11	26	28	33
A.I.S	26	10	2	14	33	35	32
Essendon Royals (R)	26	8	7	11	30	35	31
Sunshine Georgies(R)	26	7	8	11	23	38	29
Kingston City (R)	26	7	6	13	32	38	27
Springvale White Eagles (R)	26	1	2	23	17	77	5

TOP SIX SERIES

Week 1

ELIMINATION FINAL 2
Altona Magic 0
Oakleigh Cannon 1

ELIMINATION FINAL 1
Whittlesea Zebras 2
Green Gully Cavaliers 1

QUALIFYING FINAL
Preston Lions 1
Melbourne Knights 0

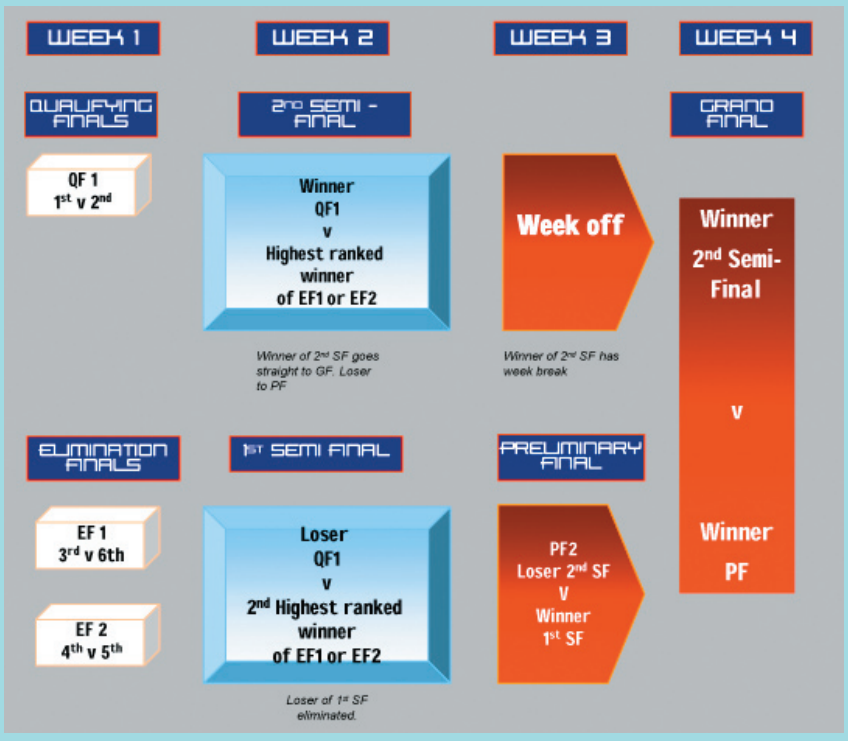
Week 2
Major Semi-Final
Whittlesea Zebras 2
Preston Lions 1
(Zebras into Grand Final, Lions into Preliminary Final)

Minor Semi-Final
Melbourne Knights 1
Oakleigh Cannons 0
(Knights into Preliminary Final, Cannons eliminated)

Week 3
Preliminary Final
Preston Lions 2
Melbourne Knights 1
Sunday 30th September
(Winner into Grand Final, loser eliminated)

WEEK 4
Grand Final
Whittlesea Zebras v
Preston Lions

FINALS FORMAT



THE TOP MARKSMEN

Player, Club	Goals
Masi, Esala Oakleigh Cannons FC	15
Curcija, Michael Altona Magic SC	12
Nilo, Juan Oakleigh Cannons FC	12
Pelikan, Anthony Melbourne Knights	12

TOP SIX SERIES

FOXTEL CUP GRAND FINAL

WHITTLESEA ZEBRAS v PRESTON LIONS
Sunday 7th Oct
Bob Jane Stadium
KO 3PM

FOXTEL CUP WPL GRAND FINAL

HEIDELBERG UNITED v BOX HILL INTER
Sunday 7th Oct
Bob Jane Stadium
KO 12PM

Please check www.footballfedvic.com.au for confirmation of all VPL Top Six Fixture Details

ASHBURTON

1 - 3

BOX HILL INTER

BOX HILL PREVAILS OVER ASHY

Inter in box seat to defend title

By George Egonidis
Photos by Daniel Flis

The two best performed sides over the home-and-away season will meet in next weekend's WPL Grand Final after Box Hill Inter defeated Ashburton 3-1 in Sunday's Preliminary Final at Bob Jane Stadium.

Minor premier Heidelberg United awaits Box Hill next week in a replay of last season's decider – the 'Bergers aiming for their first WPL crown while Inter will be gunning for an historic fifth-straight title.

For Ashburton, it's the end of the line at the Preliminary Final stage for the second consecutive year after once again being amongst the leading contenders following a solid regular season campaign.

Kicking towards the Albert Park Lake end in the opening period, Ashburton, with the aid of a stiff breeze, had the better of the early going on Sunday.

But it was Box Hill which almost nicked the opener on 5 minutes when Daniela Digiammarco was on the end of a Louisa Bisby flick-on from a deep Amanda Lawless corner – the Inter sweeper unable to keep down her shot from less than six yards out.

That early scare aside, the momentum was with Ashburton, which was finding space in midfield through the industrious Tal Karp, and whose forwards, Annabelle Gibney and Seyma Erenli, were proving a handful for the Inter defence.

And on 20 minutes it was Karp who sent her side ahead, firing home a blistering free-kick from 35 yards which cannoned into the underside of the crossbar before bouncing over the goalline.

Moments later, the Inter defence was in disarray following a well-taken Ashburton corner but neither Erenli nor Kristen Stensholt was able to force the ball over the line to double their side's lead.

Stensholt had another opportunity shortly afterwards when Gibney whipped in an in-swinging cross from the right, but her first-time volley went wide.

And in first-half injury time, Ashburton heads dropped when against the run of play, Box Hill found an equaliser.

Bisby was the creator, swinging in a cross which eluded both goalkeeper Antoinette Michail and Box Hill striker Kat Smith, but which Krystal McCluskey judged perfectly to head into the unguarded net.

It was a cruel blow for Ashburton, which would have gone in at the break knowing that in the conditions, failing to take a lead into the second half would present an uphill challenge against the WPL's most seasoned finals outfit.

And so it proved, as an invigorated Inter emerged after the interval intent on putting its opponent to the sword.

Bisby had two good chances inside the first 10 minutes – failing to keep a shot down after being picked out by Genia Avram's cross and firing over the bar from just outside the penalty area.

Inter's Krystal McCluskey gets the show on the road by opening the scoring yesterday.

Smith then crashed a shot wide of Michail's upright as Box Hill set up camp in Ashburton's defensive third.

On 68 minutes, Bisby's speculative ball to the top of the penalty area caused confusion amongst the Ashburton defence and substitute Jess Humble, only moments after entering the fray, was there to capitalise as she peeled off her marker to fire Inter 2-1 up.

And less than a minute later, Box Hill booked its place in yet another Grand Final when Avram's cross found an unmarked Bisby at the back stick – the Inter midfielder nodding home from close range to complete the win.

Goalkeeper Helen Klerides gives Anthea Vardakas a winning hug as the Inter girls prepare to make it five titles in a row.

ResultsVault football
Visit http://football.resultsvault.com for football results and statistics

PRESTON LIONS

2 - 1

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS

LIONS PREPARE TO ROAR FOR GLORY

Clinical Lions knock off gallant Knights

By Josip Loncaric
Photos by Daniel Flis

With the picturesque Albert Park Lake as a backdrop, the Lions and Knights went to battle for a place in the 2007 Foxtel Cup Grand Final, with the Lions emerging 2-1 victors over an unfortunate Knights side. A strong crowd of over 3, 500 saw a scintillating match that produced several talking points that will no doubt be hotly debated well after the conclusion of the match

After five minutes of uninspiring football by both sides, the Knights created the first opening of the match. Anthony Pelikan and Cameron Watson exchanged passes on the edge of the Lions penalty area, but the latter fired his shot over the bar in the seventh minute of the match.

Several minutes later, the Lions responded with what should have been the opening goal of the Preliminary final. Some good work by the Lions midfield allowed lively right midfielder Marinos Gasparis to half-volley an effort toward goal from a brilliant Tony Sterjovski cross. Fortunately for the Knights, Gasparis' goal-bound effort was well saved by goalkeeper Adrian Cagalj. The loose ball fell to Blaze Georgioski, who toepoked his effort towards goal but Cagalj was again on hand to deflect the ball off the post, before his defenders relieved the pressure.

A Gasparis cross in 16th minute was cleared by an excellent header from Knights makeshift central defender Craig Elvin, and the match was finally alive.

In the 25th minute, the turning point in the match severely dented the Knights chances of progression. A dangerous cross by Lions wide man Tony Sterjovski from a poorly conceded free kick by the Knights was punched clear by Cagalj, but the ball was worked back to Sterjovski, who again delivered a telling ball into the penalty area. Again Cagalj's excellent keeping saw the ball cleared away from the danger area, however the Knights keeper collided with onrushing Lions defender Steven Pace, leaving both players on the floor and in need of attention. Clearly the worse off from the challenge, Cagalj struggled to his feet, but it became apparent soon after that he would not be able to continue in the second half

The Lions, under strict instructions from Coach Goran Lozanovski, continued to press and were rewarded in the 37th minute with the opening goal of the game. Yet another penetrating Sterjovski cross towards the back post was headed home by a poorly marked Zoran Petrevski, to the absolute delight of the Lions players and supporters. An obviously groggy Cagalj could do little to prevent the goal, and the Knights knew that their job had been made that much harder by the setback.

The second, perhaps more significant incident in the match happened in the final minutes of the first half. Knight's midfielder Anthony Pelikan, who had already been booked for a needless challenge in the centre of the pitch, was sent off for simulation by referee Senko Rastocic for his second bookable offence. The controversial decision left the Knights without their main attacking threat, much to the disgust of Chris Taylor, who had to be restrained by his players at the interval.

Things just went from bad to worse for the Knights for the beginning of the second half as Cagalj was replaced by youngster Marijo Bosnjak at half time.

Bosnjak was soon called into action in the 50th minute, when a good Jonathan Munoz cross evaded everyone in the Knights box, including the reserve goalkeeper.

Taylor's side wasn't about to lie down to the minor premiers and in the 52nd minute, a stunning Daniel Visevic effort from all of 30 yards was tipped over by a marvellous fingertip save by Savas Ozdemir in the Lions goal.

Sensing a chance at exposing the frail Lions defence (after Les Anastasiou was also forced off the field by an injury), the Knights coaching staff introduced supersub Mate Dugandzic into the match, and the move was justified almost immediately.

A brilliant break through the midfield by Dugandzic released Visevic with only Ozdemir to beat, but the youngster only managed to place his shot into the arms of the young Lions custodian. It was another pivotal moment in the match that went against the Knights, and it would prove to be costly later on in game.

Preston responded with a break through of their own, as the lively Petrevski beat the offside trap only to be denied by a save by Bosnjak, who knocked the ball away for a corner with his right foot.

The ensuing corner kick fell to a disappointing Blaze Gorgiovski, but the experienced attacking midfielder saw his shot saved by Bosnjak, who was desperate to keep the score down.

With less than 15 minutes to play, the Knights began their final onslaught, which saw headed efforts by Joe Spiteri and Alex Kiratzoglou fail to produce what would have been a deserved equaliser.

A Watson corner fell to Visevic in the final minutes of the match, but his misshit shot from the edge of the area skewed wide of the Lions goal.

With the Knights committed forward, a loose ball in the midfield was eventually worked through to Lions substitute Igor Arsovski. The talented midfielder neatly chipped the ball over an advancing Bosnjak to seal the match and confirm his side's passage into the Foxtel Cup grand final.

The Knights salvaged some pride in injury time, as a Watson free kick was headed into Ozdemir's left upright by Kiratzoglou, and Joe Spiteri was on hand to smash home what proved to be only a consolation goal for the gallant Knights.

The referee blew the final whistle in an enthralling match, signalling the end of the Knights season and the beginning of Preston's Grand Final preparation.

Preston's Zoran Petrevski points the way to a Grand Final date with Whittlesea Zebras

Man of the Match:
Pece SIVESKI
(Preston Lions)

Preston: Ozdemir, Munoz, Anastasiou (Miskas), Pir, Gasparis, Sterjovski, Sapazovski (Arsovski), Petrevski, Pace, Siveski, Gorgiovski

Unused substitutes: Stojanovski, Micovski, Masalovski

Knights: Cagalj (Bosnjak), Iosifidis (Dugandzic), Milardovic, Piorkowski (Waldon), Spiteri, Watson, Visevic, Franjic, Elvin, Pelikan, Kiratzoglou

Unused substitutes: Matkovic, Batur

Crowd: 3, 500

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DAY OF JUDGEMENT ARRIVES

Sunday 7th October, Bob Jane Stadium, KO 3pm

After seven months of toiling, Whittlesea Zebras have surprised many by claiming a place in the 2007 Foxtel Cup Grand Final.

As a newly formed amalgamation of the Whittlesea and Bulleen clubs, no great feats were envisaged for Whittlesea Zebras in 2007, but performances characterised by unity and spirit have guided them to the season's concluding match.

The Zebras began the season under the guidance of former Bulleen coach, Michael Michalakopoulos, before personal reasons forced his resignation midway through the season. Former Australian national player and member of Australia's 1974 World Cup campaign, Peter Ollerton, inherited Michalakopoulos' side in a healthy condition; though the performance of the Zebras since Ollerton took charge is sure to have exceeded most expectations.

Taking over in round 19, Ollerton has guided the Zebras on a run of form that, including finals, extends to 11 matches undefeated. This prolific late season form saw Whittlesea finish third on the ladder with only goal difference coming between them and a finals double chance.

Their route to the Grand Final began with a 2-1 extra-time win against Green Gully Cavaliers in an elimination final with Steve Martin providing a 105th minute strike to confirm his side's passage through to the semi-finals.

Minor premiers Preston Lions awaited Whittlesea in the second semi-final. The match would grant the winner a place in the Grand Final and the right to claim supremacy in Victoria's northern region. Hamlet Armenian and Steve Martin supplied the goals in Whittlesea's 2-1 upset victory over the minor premiers, and the first place in the Grand Final belonged to Whittlesea.

Whittlesea's success has been vastly credited to their collective team performances, but so often in big matches results can be decided by individual brilliance. Hamlet Armenian, Tex Apostolikas and Steve Martin are the players most likely to provide a match-deciding individual performance for the Zebras.

Hamlet Armenian is a central to Whittlesea's attacking dexterity and has already proved his finals expertise by netting in both of the Zebras' finals matches, taking his season tally to nine goals.

Tex Apostolikas joins Armenian in attack and with the support of Steve Martin, the three form a formidable attacking triumvirate that will be crucial to their side's success. Steve Martin's finals performances thus far have shown he too is a player suited to the big occasion, having scored in both of Whittlesea's finals victories.

Having never experienced defeat under the guidance of Peter Ollerton, it would be cruel if an Ollerton-controlled Whittlesea were to suffer their first defeat in the most important match of the season. Though, irrespective of the result, Whittlesea's 2007 efforts are worthy of praise. There will be no doubt, however, that having reached the last day of the season the Zebras will be expecting victory; and by the end of next weekend, the 2007 Foxtel Cup may belong to the newest Victorian football entity.

By Sebastian Kipman

Photos by Daniel Flis

The Zebras line up against Green Gully before the final home and away game of the season. The Zebras won 2-1.

1974 World Cup Socceroo, Peter Ollerton, hopes to repeat the success of 2004

The Zebras and the Lions met in the Community Cup earlier in the season and their destiny appeared to be written. The match finished 1-1.

Zoran Petrevski has been in sensational form in front of goal for the Lions all year.

Former Socceroo, Goran Lozanovski, hopes to capture Preston's first Championship since 2002

Having headed the table at the end of the season the Preston Lions have reached the 2007 Foxtel Cup Final with a 2-1 win over the Melbourne Knights.

The minor premiers won their first final against the Melbourne Knights before suffering a 2nd Semi-Final loss to Whittlesea Zebras. Their Championship dream was not derailed by the defeat, with another win over the Knights giving them a chance at redemption in the biggest game of the season.

Goran Lozanovski entered his second year at the helm of the Lions not needing to make major changes to a squad which had finished off the 2006 season in good form. A poor start that year saw it at the foot of the table midseason before a strong finish in which Finals football was a possibility going into the final round.

In 2007 it was an FFV imposed deduction of three points which put the club behind the mark at the start of season. Another slow start followed, with draws at the Knights and Altona Magic and a loss to Fawkner Blues. The round four win against an in-form A.I.S. kick started the campaign, as it was followed by three successive wins. By July the run had extended to sixteen games unbeaten before a thrilling 3-4 defeat by the A.I.S.

The rise to the top of the table was unhindered by the loss of inspirational goalkeeper Ljupche Acevski to Czech Republic outfit FK Siad Most. As he did in 2006, youngster Savas Ozdemir stepped into the breach admirably.

Preston's defence also had to deal with the departure of Isiyan Erdogan to Adelaide United, but Les Anastasiou marshalled his troops into conceding only 26 goals in the regular season, the fourth best record in the league.

In attack is where Preston excelled. In scoring 44 goals for the season they were only bettered by Oakleigh. Strikers Blaze Georgioski and Zoran Petrevski led the way with 10 and 8 goals respectively, with Johnny Sapasovski and Nick Lazarevski bagging 7 apiece.

Anastasiou and Lazaresvki are survivors of the 2002 Grand Final winning team, and the team is not lacking in big match experience.

A final round loss to Essendon was only the third defeat for the club in the season, and not enough to deny it top spot on the table. Second-placed Melbourne Knights were beaten twice over the course of the finals, setting up a fourth clash with the Zebras for the title. With a win, draw and loss to their rivals, there has been little between the sides this season setting up a thrilling encounter for the crown on Sunday.

By Mark Boric

Photos by John Punshon

Sharp-shooter Tex Apostolakis didn't take time to find his aim in the Foxtel Cup after moving mid-season from Altona East.

John Angelovski (above right) and stiker Hamlet Armenian have epitomised the Zebras spirit with stellar a season.

GOAL! WEEKLY

PAST GRAND FINAL WINNERS

2006 SOUTH MELBOURNE 1 - 0 ALTONA MAGIC
2005 GREEN GULLY 2 - 0 HEIDELBERG UTD
2004 BULLEEN ZEBRAS 0 - 0 ALTONA MAGIC
(*ZEBRAS WON ON PENALTIES*)
2003 GREEN GULLY 1 - 0 FRANKSTON PINES
2002 PRESTON LIONS 2 - 1 FAWKNER BLUES
2001 HEIDELBERG UTD 2 - 2 PORT MELBOURNE
(*HEIDELBERG WON ON PENALTIES*)

Tony Sterjovski (above left) and defender Steven Pace have been solid and consistent throughout the year.

There's no doubt that on its day Preston produces the most devasting form in the Foxtel Cup. As was the case when it overcame a two goal deficit to beat Green Gully 3-2.

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FUTSAL FEVER HITS ENDEAVOUR HILLS

As of this year, 45,000 players nationally were registered to play in local Futsal competitions.

At a first glance, this figure may seem miniscule in comparison to AFL, Cricket and even traditional eleven a-side football. What must be considered is that Futsal has achieved this figure in a relatively small time frame and mostly without the infrastructure and finance afforded to the abovementioned sports but it is changing, now that FIFA has made Futsal it's official indoor 5 a-side sport.

At first, many players accustomed to outdoor Football generally consider Futsal to be a way to keep fit or to have a social kick whilst waiting for winter pre-season to start. However, many players get bitten by the "Futsal bug" as most players develop a skill set they never knew they had, due to the smaller playing area, faster pace and heavier ball. In a world where work and family commitments can often clash with sport, the benefit of having matches at the same venue and of 40min duration make it possible to arrive, play and return home in a very short space of time.

Watching the likes of Ronaldinho and Ronaldo who grew up playing Futsal as children, and the influence that Futsal has had to many Brazilians is obvious. Futsal is so highly valued within Brazil that children must play the game exclusively until their teen years, where they "graduate" to playing outdoor Football.

Australians have been fortunate to witness first hand the value of Futsal and its benefits. The skilful flamboyance of current Socceroo Nick Carle originates from his Futsal beginnings and South Melbourne player Fernando De Moraes is a joy to watch as his VPL player of the year title testifies. Fernando exclusively played Futsal until he was an adult.

The next step for the growth of Futsal is regular meaningful competitions, much the same as what is currently experienced locally within the outdoor game. To this end, Flames Futsal, based in Endeavour Hills is working towards this goal. Its first season will begin within the next few weeks and teams will have an extra incentive to play for.

The grand finalists of its Wednesday evening competition will compete in a "Champions League" competition against other suburban Futsal centre finalists. In the future, it is hoped that this concept is expanded to include the involvement of all centres, such that one team will be crowned the overall Futsal Champion of Melbourne.

At Flames Futsal, teams will have player stats recorded so that milestones such as 100 games or 50 goals are acknowledged. A "Hall of Fame" will be created with the objective that all players can take pride in their achievements.

It is still not too late to be a part of the Flames Futsal summer season. Limited vacancies for teams and individuals still exist for Wednesday and Friday night senior competitions.

For more information, you can visit Flames Futsal at www.flamesfutsal.com.au

Futsal Teams Needed!

Eumemmerring College Gym,
Amalfi Drive, Endeavour Hills
(Melways 91 A5)

John - 0412 199 639
enquiries@flamesfutsal.com.au

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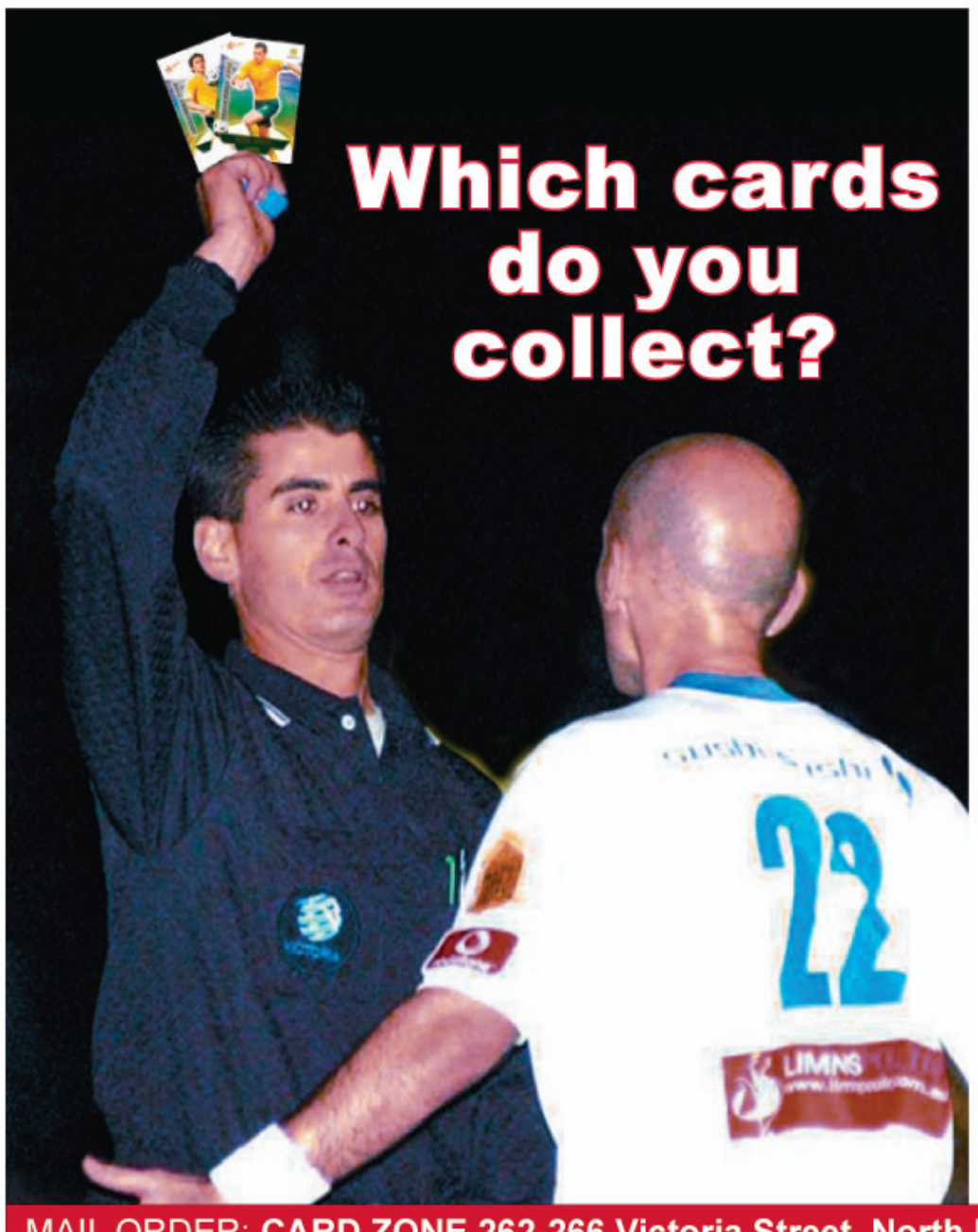

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TARTAN TALK with Nic Townsend

Yet More Good News For Scotland

For the Scottish national team, news just seems to be getting better and better. This week UEFA announced that seedings for the qualifying groups for the 2010 World Cup would be based on FIFA world rankings.

The timing could not be better for Scotland. Only weeks after beating France in Paris, a victory that could well prove to be the greatest for a whole generation of Scots, Scotland are now ranked at a record high of 14th. In a measure of how far they have improved, as recently as March 2005 they were ranked at 88th.

Previously seedings for World Cup qualifiers had been determined by a team's two previous qualifying campaigns. Under this system, Scotland would be a fourth seed, and at best possibly a third seed.

Their improved performances since the last World Cup qualifiers would have counted for nothing, and would have quite likely seen them drawn into a group as equally as difficult as the one they ate currently in for Euro 2008.

But Scotland's 14th ranking makes them the 11th highest ranked team amongst Europe's 53 nations. Regardless of how the rest of their Euro 2008 campaign goes, they will be amongst the second seeds when the World Cup groups are drawn in November. If they can maintain their form, they could even push themselves into the first seeds, something that would not have even been considered possible during the disastrous Berti Vogts era.

The Tartan Army can't recall since when it had it so good.

League Cup

In domestic football, this week saw the third round of the CIS League Cup, the first silverware on offer this season. Of late it has been nicknamed by many Scots as the Useless Cup, due to the fact that the winner no longer earns a place in Europe and that the prize money is the equivalent of an Old Firm player's weekly wage. Nevertheless, as usual SPL sides dominated this week's ties. Celtic initially struggled but eventually overcome a diligent Dundee 2-1. Aberdeen defeated Partick Thistle, while a second-string Rangers side cruised past East Fife 4-0. Motherwell knocked out current holders Hibs 4-2. The only club to defy the SPL heavyweights was First Division's Hamilton Accies who beat Kilmarnock 2-0, to become the only non-SPL side still in the competition.

The quarterfinals will see Celtic host Hearts at Parkhead, while Rangers will travel to Motherwell. Aberdeen and Inverness CT will meet in a Highland derby, and Hamilton will play Dundee United at Tannadice.

Outside Of The SPL.

Hamilton Accies League Cup win this week was just the latest victory in what has so far been a very successful season. Last week they dropped their first points after a 1-1 draw with Livingstone. But they remain on top undefeated with six wins in seven games. Further down the table lie Dunfermline and Livingstone, the last two SPL sides to be relegated into First Division. They both sit 2nd last and 3rd last respectively, and with only one win each neither are likely to make a quick return to the SPL.

In Second Division Ross County lead, but are followed closely by Raith Rovers, Airdrie United, Peterhead and Ayr United. Brechin and Berwick languish near the bottom. East Fife and Stranraer look the stronger sides in Third Division, while Forfar leads the race to earn the title of worst league side in Britain as they sit on the bottom with only three points.

And Finally

In an indication of how under resourced some Scottish clubs are, Kilmarnock had to cancel training this week due to a larger then average injury list. When striker David Fernandez limped off the training pitch Thursday, manager Jim Jeffries cancelled the rest of the session fearing another injury would leave him without a full team to play Hibs on Saturday.

International Soccer Coaching

With Soccerroo Legend Eddie Krncevic

For a very long time youth soccer players in Geelong have been deprived of high quality coaching and development, forcing a vast number of players to travel to various destinations of Melbourne on a regular basis to receive such coaching.

The above will be changing in the near future with the introduction of the "International Institute of Football".
The institute intends to set up an all year round program here in Geelong, which will be unique for Australian standards.

The program will cater for both boys and girls between the ages of 10 to 17 and will be offered to players of all standards and ability. (Elite) and (Development)
The program will comprise of 4 x 10 weeks semesters and will commence later in 2007.

The instructors are of the highest caliber with National and International coaching experience and will include coaches such as former Australian International Eddie Krncevic.

The Football (soccer) players of Geelong will have the opportunity to experience the future program in a 2 day camp, which will be an introduction of what's to come once the program commences.
The 2 day camp will include various facets of the game including technical skills and techniques used at leading academies around the world.

Don't miss out on a once in a life time opportunity to be coached in a true professional environment.

Eddie Krncevic

DETAILS

Date: Saturday 20th October & Sunday 21st October

Time: 9.30am to 1.30pm both days

Venue: Elcho Park - Gibbons Road Lara
(North Geelong Soccer Club Grounds)

Payment: $100.00 per player, cost covers both days.
Payment can be sent with your enrolment form or paid on the morning of the first day on the camp. Payment will only be accepted in cash or cash cheque or money order.

On the day: You must register and make payment between 8.00am and 9.00am on the first day of the camp.

Enrolment: Forms must be filled in and recieved no later than Wednesday the 12th of September. Forms received following thiis day will not be accepted due to the requirement to finalise participaton numbers.

Name : _____
D.O.B. _____
Address: _____
Home Phone: _____
Email Address: _____
Payment with enrolment from ( ) or on the day ( ) please tick
Parent Name : _____

T: 9645 1440 F: 9645 1305
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Please cut out enrolment form and send it to
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PO BOX 142 PORT MELBOURNE 3207

REDKNAPP HAILS PORTSMOUTH´S MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp saluted his magnificent seven after watching his side rout Reading 7-4 in the highest scoring game in Premier League history.

Redknapp's side went goal crazy in a sensational game at Fratton Park that featured 11 goals, a missed penalty and a hat-trick from notoriously shot-shy striker Benjani Mwaruwari.

It was Portsmouth's biggest top-flight win for over 50 years and Redknapp was ecstatic.

"We were fantastic. We went in 2-1 up at half-time but we should have been four up," he said. "We had completely dominated the game and they had never even had a shot.

"Their keeper made an incredible save to deny Glen Johnson and then they scrambled a goal at the other end. It should have been game over but it was game on.

"But we came back at them, kept going forward and we played some great football today. There were some quality performances out there."

There was an early sign of the carnage to come when Benjani broke the deadlock for Portsmouth in the seventh minute, but the next goal took half an hour to arrive.

It was superb solo effort by Benjani and that opened the floodgates.

Stephen Hunt and Dave Kitson had brought Reading level by the 48th minute.

Hermann Hreidarsson headed Pompey back infront, then Benjani's third was followed by a fine strike from Nico Kranjcar and, after substitute Shane Long had pulled one back for Reading, Sean Davis netted a long-rang shot before Sulley Muntari made it 7-3 from the

spot.

Nicky Shorey, who had earlier seen a penalty saved by David James, had the last word with a deflected fourth for the visitors.

Reading manager Steve Coppell admitted it was the most incredible experience of his football career, albeit one he would like to forget as soon as possible.

"I have never been involved in a game like that before," Coppell said. "It's hard to remember anything like that either as a player or a manager.

"It seemed as though when either side attacked it was going to end up in the back of the net."

STRACHAN HAILS HIS FREE-SCORING CELTS

Gordon Strachan hailed his free scoring Celtic team after they moved top of the Scottish Premier League on Saturday with a 3-0 at home to Dundee United.

This victory - courtesy of Australian striker Scott McDonald's hat-trick - coupled with Rangers' 1-1 draw at Motherwell, means the Parkhead side now lead their Old Firm rivals, with a goal difference of plus five.

Celtic have now scored an astonishing 27 times in only seven SPL games - although the fact they have conceded six has led to questions being asked of their defence.

This may not be too much of a concern in the domestic game, but with holders AC Milan their next Champions League opponents on Wednesday at Celtic Park, there are fears a weak rearguard could hamper their European ambitions.

However, Strachan conceded he is not too bothered about losing goals as long as his team continue to hammer them in at the other end.

The Celtic manager said: "The most pleasing thing for me is we're scoring goals. If you can score goals you always have a chance of winning matches.

"Last season in some games we found it very hard to make chances but now in most games we're making numerous chances and that's the most satisfying thing."

Strachan continued: "There were some good individual performances, especially from the forwards, which is pleasing before the AC Milan game.

"The way we play we are always going to give away a couple of chances.

"On Saturday Artur made a world class save and Stephen McManus blocked a shot, but we created 15 or 16 chances."

Although the victory, and returning to the top of the table, will have boosted confidence for the Champions League match, Celtic's hopes of defeating the Italian giants suffered a blow when Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink limped off in the first half.

Strachan admitted the Dutch international striker has little chance of facing the Italian giants.

However, the Celtic manager is still hoping their Japanese star Shunsuke Nakamura, who has missed their last three games with a ligament injury to his left knee, may still make it.

Strachan said: "Big Jan has injured his hamstring and it doesn't look good. He only has an outside chance of being ready for Wednesday.

"I'm not sure about Nakamura, but we'll have a look at him and make up our minds on Monday."

One player who could be key to Celtic's hopes on Wednesday is Republic of Ireland international Aiden McGeady.

In addition to setting up two of McDonald's goals, McGeady's trickery and direct running were a constant source of trouble for Dundee United.

Strachan said: "Aiden played well. He was terrific. The more we gave him the ball the better he became.

"Recently he played on the left and won the man-of-the-match award and today he was brilliant playing on the right so it doesn't seem to matter which side he plays."

Celtic had taken the lead in only the seventh minute on Saturday.

McGeady skipped past Barry Robson before chipping the ball to the back post for Vennegoor of Hesselink and, although the Dutchman's header was palmed away by United's Polish goalkeeper Grzegorz Szamotulski, McDonald was on hand to nod home from close range.

In the 66th minute Scott Brown burst through the centre of the United defence before playing in McDonald, who showed good strength to hold off his marker before rounding the goalkeeper and rolling the ball into the empty net.

And McDonald completed his hat-trick in the 72nd minute, stealing in at the back post to poke home McGeady's cross.

Socceroo Scott McDonald,, was Celtic´s hat-trick hero as they returned to the top of the Scottish Premier League with a 3-0 win at home to Dundee United.

INTER MILAN SHOOT TWO POINTS CLEAR IN ITALY

Inter Milan won 4-1 at 10-man AS Roma on Saturday for a convincing victory in this top-of-the-table clash to surge two points clear of the Italian championship.

Ahead of Sunday's clashes, the highlight of which will be the Turin derby between Torino and Juventus, unbeaten Milan have a two-point cushion on Fiorentina who also kept their slate clean with a 3-0 win at tailenders Livorno.

The Romans were quickly reduced to 10 men to hamper their task when Frenchman Ludovic Giuly was sent off.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored from a 29th-minute penalty to put the visitors ahead at the Olympic stadium, though Simone Perrotta equalised for Roma in the 53rd minute.

However further goals from Milan by Hernan Crespo, Julio Cruz and then Ivan Cordoba meant Inter had scored their four with more than 20 minutes to go till full time.

For Roma, the defeat was particularly badly-timed with midweek European action looming.

Following two draws against Fiorentina (2-2) and then Juventus (2-2), Luciano Spalletti's men travel to England on Tuesday to face Manchester United in the Champions League where they had been humiliated by a 7-1 defeat in the quarter-final, second leg of last season's competition in April.

Reigning Italian champions Inter, still handicapped by the absences of injured players Patrick Vieira, Marco Materazzi and Cristian Chivu, and a suspension to Brazilian Maicon, made the most of a major mistake by Giuly, who did a handball in the middle of his own area following an Inter counterattack leading to the first goal.

Giuly was shown the red card and Ibrahimovic stepped up to score from the spot.

Swede Ibrahimovic has now scored five times within a week to put him on top of Italy's goalscoring charts with seven, one ahead of Juventus striker David Trezeguet.

Inter made numerical superiority count and gave themselves the luxury of resting Ibrahimovic after the break when they brought on Hernan Crespo and Julio Cruz, for Frenchman Olivier Dacourt, as Roberto Mancini perhaps had one eye on Tuesday's home match against PSV Eindhoven which has taken on even more importance since Inter's opening defeat to Turks Fenerbahce in the Champions League group stages.

Mancini's substitutions proved decisive as both Argentinians got on the scoresheet before Colombian defender Cordoba added Inter's fourth.

Meanwhile, a double from Argentine striker Pablo Daniel Osvaldo helped Fiorentina to victory against long time Tuscan rivals Livorno.

Osvaldo put Fiorentina ahead at the stroke of half-time in a bad tempered clash which saw the visiting coach Nando Orsi sent off for dissent during the break.

Livorno were reduced to ten men after Massimo Loviso fouled Gianpaolo Pazzini after 63 minutes, allowing Osvaldo net his second when he chested down Mario Alberto Santana's pass and fired over the goalkeeper. Santana sealed Fiorentina's win three minutes later.

HENRY HAT-TRICK FIRES BARCELONA TO SUMMIT

Thierry Henry scored a sensational hat-trick, his first league goals for Barcelona, as they nudged rivals Real Madrid off the summit with a crushing 4-1 win over Levante on Saturday.

French superstar Henry had been waiting patiently for his first goal in the Spanish championship since his 24-million-euro summer move from Arsenal and like the buses three came at once.

Henry broke his duck on 17 minutes sliding the ball home after Lionel Messi's initial shot was saved.

The second arrived seven minutes later when the Frenchman raced on to a brilliant pass from Messi and produced a trademark side-footed finish.

Henry capped a fine game with his third after 48 minutes before Messi scored two minutes later and the Argentine now tops the scoring charts with five goals.

"I am delighted for Thierry," said Messi. "It is great that he is off the mark and we are happy to get another three points from a great display."

It was Barcelona's first away win of the season and on this evidence there will be many more as bottom side Levante were pulverised by the marauding runs of Messi and Henry.

Barcelona now lead the 20-strong table although Real, just one point behind, can reclaim top spot with a draw or win at Getafe on Sunday.

There is no rest for Barcelona who travel to Germany to face VfB Stuttgart in the Champions League on Tuesday.

If the German champions watched this display they will be quaking at the prospect of containing Argentine Wunderkind Messi who was sensational with his mesmerising runs reminiscent of Diego Maradona in his pomp.

The Spanish media hailed Messi, 20, as the greatest player on the planet this week labelling him the 'Messi-ah' and he was simply unplayable at times.

A year ago Ronaldinho was regarded as the world's finest but the Brazilian, who has had a difficult time with loss of form and reports of inappropriate off-the-field antics, was again missing due to a calf injury and Barcelona have now won three games in a row in his absence.

Another boost for Barcelona was the return of captain Carles Puyol who came on for his first appearance since suffering a knee injury in June.

While Barcelona are flying title hopefuls Sevilla are showing no sign of recovering from their current slump, crashing to their third successive league defeat with a 2-0 reverse at Real Zaragoza on Saturday.

Argentine Andres D'Alessandro broke the deadlock on 53 minutes and Sergio Garcia struck late on to condemn Sevilla to a fourth straight defeat in all competitions.

"There is a long way to go yet and other teams have been in this situation before," said Sevilla forward Frederic Kanoute.

"Real Madrid were in a similar situation and ended up winning the league last year."

After winning their first two league matches Sevilla have lost 3-0 at Arsenal in the Champions League and have consequently fallen against Barcelona, Espanyol and now Zaragoza.

The UEFA Cup holders are now eight points behind leaders Barcelona and need to regroup for Slavia Prague in the Champions League on Tuesday.

By Nick Townsend

WHAT A WASTE OF MONEY

Aston Villa fans must be wondering if Martin O'Neill really is the best person to spend their hard-earned cash after last week's Carling Cup defeat at home to Leicester.

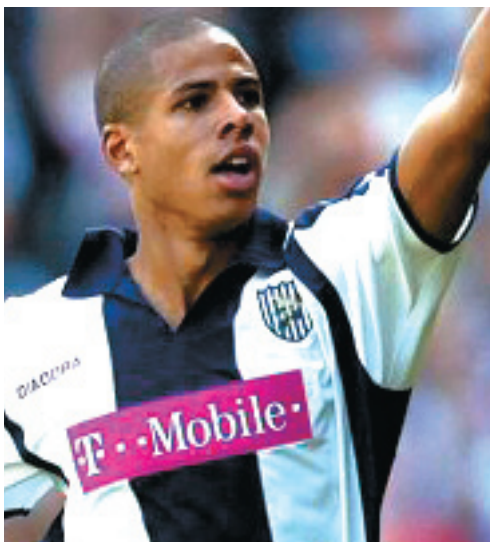
In a interview of amazing, and some would stay foolish, honesty debutant Curtis Davies bucked the trend of players banging on about how great they are by declaring "I was just awful". He went on to bemoan his own shortcomings in detail "I didn't contribute anything. I've been bigging myself up, saying I'm ready and obviously I'm not. I'm not good enough to get in the team yet".

O'Neill may be wondering why he spent 10 million big ones on bringing the defender the short distance from West Brom. If his abilities are in doubt then at least no-one should doubt his candidness "I'm honest with myself in every performance and that was rubbish. I looked like a pub team player". If only us pub team players got paid 20 grand a week.

Another expensive summer signing who is not looking great value for money at the moment is Brazilian "wonderkid" Anderson who Alex Ferguson splashed out 17 million quid to bring to Old Trafford from Porto. Ferguson was left with egg on his face as an inexperienced United team crashed out of the Carling Cup with a 2-0 home defeat against Coventry. Season ticket holders who have been forced to buy tickets for all United's cup games through the Automatic Cup Scheme were left dismayed as a limited Coventry side cruised through to the next round leaving John O'Shea, one of the few first team regulars to play, bemoaning a lack of effort and commitment from some of the younger players.

Ferguson has always described Anderson as one for the future but 17m is a massive amount to pay for a reserve team player and Ferguson's reaction to Anderson's performance suggests the 19-year old may not be enjoying a first team run out for some time. Even in these days of the top four dominating financially it's hard to imagine any of United's rivals paying that sort of money for a player not ready for first team football. Anderson's only Premier League appearance of the season was against Sunderland at the beginning of September when he was hauled off at half-time and the United boss must be hoping that he can continue to rely on 33-year old Paul Scholes for another season or two as his young replacement looks way off the pace at the moment.

A player that is looking the business despite a big price tag is Fernando Torres who surprisingly started Liverpool's Carling Cup tie at Reading. He repaid Rafa Benitez with a hat trick in a 4-2 win against Steve Coppell's struggling Royals. Holders Chelsea also booked a place in the fourth round after a comfortable 4-0 away win at Hull, Avram Grant sending out a strong team to ensure there were no slip ups. In the other all premier league ties Tottenham brought Martin Jol some respite by disposing of Middlesbrough while Bolton edged past Fulham after extra time and Blackburn thumped Birmingham 3-0. Unlike United there were no problems for Arsenal's youth team who breezed past a tired looking Newcastle 2-0. As ever, Arsene Wenger has assembled a gifted and committed set of youngsters and it will be interesting to see if they can go all the way to Wembley.



Making waves in the Midlands: Villa fans will have to wait and see whether Curtis Davies' expensive tranfer fee is worth the weight in gold.

HLEB INJURY TAKES SHINE OFF ARSENAL´S WINNING RUN

Arsene Wenger admitted a serious injury to Alexander Hleb had stripped the gloss from Arsenal's 1-0 victory at West Ham.

The Belarussian international was stretchered off mid-way through the first half at Upton Park after being felled by a crude, shin-high lunge from Mark Noble.

The referee Alan Wiley awarded just a yellow card to the West Ham midfielder, a decision that triggered angry remonstrations from Wenger on the touchline.

His fury had barely abated when he addressed the media in his post-match press conference and, while he stopped short of accusing Noble of deliberately attempting to hurt his opponent, Wenger suggested that the collision was not entirely accidental.

"It looked very nasty, although I haven't seen it again on the replays," he said. "If it was an accident, it is a very bad accident, because if you see his [Hleb's] leg it is unbelievable.

"It is red and bruised from the knee down to the toes. We are quite optimistic because Noble is usually a fair player. I don't know if it was an accident or not, but he caught him very well."

Hleb left Upton Park on crutches and has been ruled out of Tuesday's Champions League encounter with Steaua Bucharest, although speculation last night that he had suffered a broken leg proved unfounded.

Alan Curbishley, the West Ham manager, claimed not to have seen Noble's challenge, although he did suggest Arsenal's Mathieu Flamini had been guilty of an equally reckless first-half challenge on Scott Parker.

The former Newcastle midfielder failed to re-appear for the second half, with Curbishley confirming that he had aggravated a long-standing knee injury.

Wenger's mood may have been soured by Hleb's injury, but this was still an immensely satisfying afternoon for his talented young side.

A first victory in four attempts over their east London rivals maintained Arsenal's position at the head of the English Premier League and stretched their unbeaten run this season to an impressive 11 matches.

Their latest success was sealed by Robin van Persie's well-taken 13th-minute goal, the Dutchman nodding in at the far post after Hleb had crossed from the right.

Arsenal should have built on that advantage in the second half, but Robert Green, the West Ham goalkeeper, made a string of fine saves to deny Emmanuel Adebayor, twice, and van Persie.

"We are very young but we have to show we can eke out results. We did that today and I think that shows the team is maturing tactically."

West Ham could have snatched an equaliser, first when Dean Ashton headed straight at Manuel Almunia and then when Freddie Ljungberg, playing against his old club for the first time, saw a goal incorrectly chalked off for offside, but a point would have been generous reward for a laboured performance.

Defeat, however, was the least of Curbishley's concerns. In addition to Parker's injury, the manager saw his centre-half Anton Ferdinand limp off with a hamstring strain, while Craig Bellamy is still struggling to recover from a troublesome groin injury.

"It's been this way ever since I have been at the club and we'll just have to cope with it," he said. "But I've said to the lads that they worked as hard as they could.

"We're disappointed we couldn't get back in it: if we had, it would have been anyone's match."

Arsenal´s Alexander Hleb had to be taken off the pitch due to the extent of his injuries. Arsenal won 1-0.

GRANT DEFENDS CHELSEA FLOPS

Ashley Cole(R) of Chelsea evades a tackle from Steven Davis of Fulham during the Premiership football match at Stamford Bridge in London. Chelsea endured a traumatic goalless draw with London rivals Fulham on Saturday as Avram Grant saw John Terry forced off and Didier Drogba sent off.

Chelsea manager Avram Grant refused to criticise his players after they failed to overcome Fulham at Stamford Bridge.

The home players left the field to a chorus of boos aafter this Premier League stalemate and there is deeper frustration after the sending off of Didier Drogba and injury sustained by captain John Terry.

Terry will undergo an operation on a cheekbone fracture on Sunday and is set to miss his side's trip to Valencia in the Champions League this coming week.

Chelsea trail early league leaders Arsenal by seven points already, but Israeli manager Grant is refusing to show too much concern as the pressure mounts on him to reproduce the record of Jose Mourinho.

"We had seven or eight chances, which is good, but we did not score," he said. "I think it was not our best game. We created enough to win, but unfortunately we did not score.

"We need to score, and then we need to win, I can't argue with this. This gap there, anything can happen, but we need to score goals and play better.

"The players want to do that. We need to improve a few things and then we can speak about the gap."

Terry's injury came after a first half collision with Clint Dempsey. He will now become a doubt for England's upcoming Euro 2008 qualifying matches.

"He wanted to continue," Grant said, "But we did not want to take the risk. The players said it (the challenge) was an elbow, but I have not seen a replay of it."

Chelsea dominated this west London derby, but lacked the attacking edge needed to carve open this defiant Fulham defence.

And even when they did find a way through, goalkeeper Kasey Keller denied them.

Andriy Shevcheno and Joe Cole had their best efforts of the first half, while Fulham had a half hearted penalty appeal, against Tal Ben Haim for handball, turned down.

Keller made his best save of the afternoon on 53 minutes, from Salomon Kalou. The American goalkeeper made a clever reaction save as the forward slid in on goal.

Claudio Pizarro replaced Shevchenko soon after, and while the Peruvian substitute did not test Keller, he did add a different shape to the front line.

Joe Cole came agonisingly close to an opener on 70 minutes, but then Drogba received his red card. He had been booked earlier in the game for dissent, and after a high challenge on Chris Baird he was shown a second yellow card.

It was Fulham who finished the game strongest, and should have taken all three points away.

Paul Konchesky raced away from Alex eight minutes from time, but saw his effort blocked by the feet of Petr Cech. Then in the final minute, Diomansy Kamara wasted an opportunity as Clint Dempsey narowly missed his cross-cum-shot at the far post.

"Anyone would settle for a point at Chelsea," said manager Lawrie Sanchez. "But when you are that close to ending their record you think, 'let's take it'.

"We only got a point, but that sums up our season in the league. We have not got just desserts for the points we have accumulated."

WELLINGTON PHOENIX

4 - 1

PERTH GLORY

Courtesy FFA

PHOENIX RISE TO SMASH GLORY

Wellington secures first home win

The rise of Wellington Phoenix continued – and in some style - with its first home win in the Hyundai A-League, a 4-1 triumph over Perth Glory on Sunday.

Played before a crowd of 10,127, the home fans at Westpac Stadium, Wellington, finally had three competition points to celebrate after four games at home that had also produced two draws and one loss.

Included among the five goals in the entertaining fixture was a red card issued to Perth's Dino Djulbic in the 54th minute.

The win lifted Phoenix into mid-table comfort after six rounds, and provided a timely fillip heading into a tough away schedule with games against the Queensland Roar and Newcastle Jets.

Brazilian playmaker Daniel will be missing from the first leg of the trip, however, after collecting his fourth yellow card of the season and accompanying one match suspension.

For Perth the slow start to the season continued, still winless and anchoring the competition standings.

The first half was a high tempo affair despite the windy and greasy surface conditions, with both sides testing the respective goalkeepers.

The first shot in anger came in the fifth minute when Phoenix attacking midfielder Felipe's 25m free kick went straight to Perth goalkeeper Tom Tomich.

Perth opened the scoring following a beautifully weighted midfield through ball from Jordan Simpson to Billy Celeski in the 10th minute. Celeski, clear and inside the penalty area, slotted the ball through the advancing Phoenix goalkeeper Glen Moss' legs.

The goal ended a barren spell away from home for Glory, having not scored for over 11 hours outside Perth.

Phoenix struck back four minutes later when a corner by Daniel was flicked home from one metre by captain Ross Aloisi who got his right boot in ahead of a goal-bound Tomich.

Soon after Moss denied a shot on goal by Perth midfielder Leo Bertos from just outside the six-yard box.

Phoenix took the lead in the 42nd minute when, from a right flank cross by Daniel, striker Shane Smeltz was on hand to slot the ball home from close range after Vaughan Coveny's attempted strike was deflected.

Tomich was pressed into action early in the second half, smothering a dangerous, in-swinging free kick from Felipe.

Perth defender Djulbic was shown a red card by referee Peter Green in the 54th minute after fouling Daniel. Djulbic had earlier in the half been shown a yellow card for a foul on the Brazilian.

Phoenix took advantage of its numerical supremacy almost immediately when Coveny was on hand to steer a cross from defender Tony Lochhead past a helpless Tomich and give the home side a 3-1 lead.

Smeltz missed a gilt-edged opportunity in the 73rd minute when replacement midfielder Michael Ferrante delivered a fine cross inside the penalty area. The striker's first touch let him down, however, and the ball was cleared.

Ferrante shot narrowly wide soon after as the Phoenix looked to press home its one-man advantage.

The rout was completed in the 83rd minute when Lochhead guided a cross from Daniel past Tomich from close range in front of goal to complete the scoring at 4-1.

Wellington Phoenix: 20.Glen MOSS (gk), 2.Jeremy CHRISTIE, 3.Tony LOCHHEAD, 5.Karl DODD, 7.Ross ALOISI (Captain), 8.Vaughan COVENY (6.Tim BROWN 77'), 9.Shane SMELTZ, 11.DANIEL, 12.Richard JOHNSON (15.George PALADINI 86'), 14.Steven O'DOR, 21.Felipe (10.Michael FERRANTE 71').

Substitutes Not Used: 1.Mark PASTON (gk).
Yellow Cards: Richard Johnson 62, Daniel 64', Tim Brown 84'.
Red Cards: Nil

Perth Glory: 50.Tommi TOMICH (gk), 2.Nikolai TOPOR-STANLEY, 4.Simon COLOSIMO (Captain), 6.Dino DJULBIC, 9.Mate DRAGICEVIC (25. Tyler SIMPSON 60'), 10.Billy CELESKI (15.Mitchell PRENTICE 78'), 12.Leo BERTOS,14.Jamie COYNE, 19.Naum SEKULOVSKI, 21.James ROBINSON (13. Nikita RUKAVYTSYA 62'), 24.Jordan SIMPSON.

Substitutes Not Used: 30.Tando VELAPHI (gk).
Yellow Cards: Dino Djulbic 46'/54', Simon Colosimo 47'.
Red Cards: Dino Djulbic 54'.

Ross Aloisi lends a hand in the thrashing over Glory

ADELAIDE UNITED

2 - 1

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

By Nat Adamopoulos

DJITE DOUBLE GIVES ADELAIDE FIRST WIN

Mariners succumb to first loss of the season

A Bruce Djite double gave Adelaide United their first win for the season in front of a 11,000 plus strong crowd at Hindmarsh Stadium.

If there was ever a game for Adelaide to win, this was the one. All odds going against them with 4 draws and 1 loss after 5 games, a win over top of the table Central Coast was the one to redeem themselves and win back the hearts of their loyal fans, giving them something to celebrate. After a somewhat disappointing game last week by Bajic, United's coach Aurelio Vidmar went with keeper Beltrame to strengthen his team's chances.

The script was written well with brother versus brother the Vidmars facing up to each other as coach and staunch defender, both trying to thwart each other from a personal victory. The Mariners welcoming back goal scoring machine and Adelaide home town boy Damian Mori on a short term replacement for Qantas Socceroo Nik Mrdja still a week or so away from returning to the side. Mori hoping to prove himself and score against the club he hasn't had much luck with signing for.

The opening ten minutes were set with a fast pace Bruce Djite narrowly missing an early chance to score after a great ball in from out wide of right field. The Mariners almost doing the same on a break through a Jedinak shot only a minute later. In the 16th minute Danny Vukovic was again put to work after a scramble around the penalty spot pulling off a great finger tip save over the cross bar from a Djite bullet. It wasn't long before the efforts of Djite paid off after an awkward header from the Central Coast midfield that landed to the advantage of Travis Dodd, passing the ball out wide to Nathan Burns who executed a pinpoint accurate pass to the feet of Djite in front of goal, easily putting it past Vukovic for Adelaide's first. At the 25 minute mark the free kicks were going all United's way, allowing them to get the slight upperhand on the Mariners. Although Central Coast were to intercept Adelaide's possession of the ball up front, their efforts were all but wasted losing it in the midfield all too many times. It wasn't until the 37th minute that scores were level, when ever reliable Sasha Petrovski got the final touch on a scrappy goal mouth scramble after Diego had cleared off the line just seconds before.

Three minutes later the game had a controversial moment when Mariners keeper Danny Vukovich went astray out of the box, finding himself to scramble back into his area as Djite with the ball along the boundary line took a shot. Vukovic seemed to take the ball over the back line with a diving chest save, but the Assistant Referee kept his flag down much to the disbelief of the crowd roaring at his decision. The last few minutes of the first half saw Central Coast get right back into the game, finding their way through United's defence and getting a few shots on goal to keep Beltrame working, the tide now turning with free kicks going the way of The Mariners. As referee Matthew Breeze blew the half time whistle, both sides went in with scores locked at 1:1.

It only took 2 minutes before we saw more action in the second half with a passing shot by Dodd to Kristian Sarkies who took a close range shot straight into the keepers bread basket. One minute later Diego had the opportunity to put Adelaide in front but fumbled the ball forward to goal instead of cleanly getting onto the ball. By the 55th minute we had seen a chance wasted by Dodd, unable to control a beautifully placed high ball from Cassio, speed freak Burns with a chance 1-on-1 with the keeper, Vukovic getting a touch to the ball sending it wide allowing Burns to have a second bite at the cherry, but his shot being cleared off the line by The Mariners defence.

Tony Vidmar scored himself a yellow card in the 65th minute after a clumsy tackle on Adelaide midfielder Jonas Salley. Burns on one of his famous runs in the 67th minute was brought down just outside the box with Djite drilling the ball in for a goal. But the goal was disallowed as referee Breeze had already blown his whistle for a free kick to Burns after he was brought down, Adelaide unable to capitalize. The next 10 minutes were disastrous for Central Coast as Jedinak, Boogaard also received yellow cards in the 67th and 73rd respectfully and Tony Vidmar getting an early shower call after his second yellow in the 79th minute after a bad tackle on Burns. Laurie McKenna having to reshuffle his side around making changes bringing Gumprecht on for Brown and Pondeljak for Petrovski they were always going to find it tough to overcome the Adelaide waves of attack. Adelaide gave Sarkies a rest and brought Lucas Pantelis on for some fresh legs. In the 87th minute Mr Consistent Richie Alagich took a ball out wide on the right side and put in a brilliantly cross for Djite to slam in home for Adelaide's second, getting coach Vidmar sprinting down the side line to meet his star striker and celebrate together with his chargers. Bruce Djite now has the claim to fame in becoming the only man to have scored against the Central Coast Mariners this HAL Season, giving Adelaide United their first and only win after six rounds. Aurelio Vidmar saying after the match he was relieved but extremely proud of his lads putting in 90+ minutes of pure and commitment that may now be the turning point for Adelaide United's future.

PLAYER RATINGS

ADELAIDE UNITED

Daniel Beltrame 7 great return, did his job, solid in goal
Richie Alagich 8 only marr was the own goal, assisted brilliantly
Angelo Costanzo 7 expreienced defender kept the back line strong
Cassio 7 poise and composure on the ball great, defender well
Kristian sarkies 6 free kicks wayward, underperformed
Nathan Burns 9 on song, amazing, with his runs and burst of speed
Bruce Djite 9 right place at right time, a great platform for United
Travis Dodd 7 started brilliantly, seemed to run out of puff
Jonas Salley 7 again worked hard in midfield
Robbie Cornthwaite 6 coup0le of clearances but still under performing, inexpereinced
Diego 8 one of his better games, starting to gather form, in the thick of things

Subs
Lucas Pantelis (81st) 6 not on the pitch long enough
Jason Spagnuolo (92nd) 5 no touch only on for 1 minute

Game rating: 9/10